

/159 cont. /

278 Poisoned arrows shot into the chest and abdomen are de-
 752 scribed as unconditionally deadly. Arrow wounds on extremities,
 [411] as well as very superficial ones, are supposed to be curable under
 certain circumstances if immediate help is provided.

[751] There is no inoculation against arrow poison.

[827] An older Auen suffering from badly inflamed eyes attributed
 this illness to an arrow wound he had received many years
 earlier. His statement, of course, cannot be verified.

165 Malaria is endemic and annually exacts many lives. The
 number of cases resulting in death was especially great in 1908-
 1909. Whole settlements are supposed to have died out. Epidemics
 were unknown even to the "oldest people."

Venereal diseases are blessings of civilization, but evidently
 not yet widespread.

731 Famine actually prevails every year toward the end of the
 dry season, especially if the preceding rainy season has been
 poor. During this time, almost all the Auen are emaciated to
 skeletons. Death by hunger is not supposed to /160/ occur.
 After all, the Bushman always finds something to eat, even if it
 is only grass seeds.

756 The so-called doctors decidedly possess great experience
 in medical matters, which, however, does not prevent them
 from practicing considerable charlatanism (see Section T).

W. Time Reckoning, Astronomy

805 The day is divided according to the position of the sun.
 Certain time segments are indicated with great exactitude
 according to the position of the sun. If one asks a Bushman,
 "How far is it to the watering place?" he will point to the
 place in the sky that the sun will have reached by the time one
 gets there.

The concept of the month is known (gnui, "month").

The relation of the solar year to lunar months is unknown.

The Auen divides up the year, for which, incidentally, he
 has no definite, but rather only a very vague concept, as
 follows:

[7 cont.]

222 The honey badger, !uisa (N. !ous), which leads to the
825 bees, is followed ever so eagerly.

224 The common wild pig (gariba), the kudu (daub), the
gemsbok X'uaba (N. /gaib), and all the small antelopes are
hunted. Pits are no longer known, although they used to dig
them in former times.

If they decide to go hunting, sexual intercourse must be
[834] avoided the night before. In the evening the hunters go into the
forest and spend the night there. Before dawn they rise and pray:

[539] Pu, pu, Ero, /nari dsu /ari mate God, tomorrow early we
receive.

When a piece of game has been killed, one of the
hunters cuts a piece of flesh from the animal's body and hands it
to the leader of the hunt. This meat is called am-shái-khe. A
fire is made, and this piece is placed on it. When it is roasted,
the leader cuts off a piece and shouts:

[539] Ero, Ero, Ero, ha gore, ha gore Erob, Erob, Erob, eat, eat
i Khe Khandi ô With us flesh.

After a pause:

ha ľ a ľ ha góre o Khandi ô Come! Come! Let us eat flesh.

Now the roasted flesh is consumed. Nothing is thrown
away or left behind for Erob.

Then the game is cut up, and everyone goes home with
his portion.

136 Snakes are not rare, although they are by no means as
common as in the stony regions of the southwest.

The boa constrictor eats human beings; if it catches a
Bushman, it starts to consume him at the legs!

132 In spite of the timber forest, the danger of drought is
821 great. Erob sends rain. When there is a drought, the Bushmen

● 731 dance and pray:

[539] Ero, Ero, Ero, /ga !goro Erob, Erob, Erob, we are dying of thirst
/ga-wi -ma ta re Water give us.

177 [8] It is very interesting to observe how in these certainly
776 very ancient hunting and rain prayers the former old heathen gods'
782 names Huwe and X'amab were replaced by the Christian "Ellob."

I asked the people whether they know any other prayers
and received the following answer: "We know very well that

[10 cont.]

539 X'amabe X'amabe X'amabe X'amabe God, God, God, God

782 /gami tara ai Water we can drink!

[421] [11] In the waterless wilderness of the palm bush and

291 the Otjimpolo Veld death from thirst often enough overtakes
731 even the Bushmen, accustomed as they are to privation. They[488] do not deny that at times they are forced to leave the old and
[756] the sick behind in the wilderness. But such an occurrence stays

in the people's memory for a long time as a serious misfortune.

Anyone who is acquainted with the Bushmen's love of children and veneration of parents and old people can understand what it means to them to be forced to leave behind one of their own.

271 One must have experienced personally the feeling that overcomes one when due to thirst and heat the body no longer gives off perspiration, the dry forehead feels burning hot, and a slight chill passes through the body, in order to understand this song of joy which seems so naïve, whose content is: We can drink again!

3. Short and fervent prayer at the beginning of a

539 journey:
782[484] X'amaba !Khu gai teve God, let me travel well.

[755] 4. Choral prayer for a sick person: When someone is gravely ill, the relatives sing in chorus, while the doctor performs his ceremonies.

X'amaba !khoé-wa #khai kháira téve God, let our people rise again.

789 5. Not a real prayer, but rather a formula of exorcism is said to oneself when meeting a stranger regarded as evil:

Tshuai Kwewa /Nawa!821 They do not know anything to say about the sun (sorésá).
The moon (X'awa) dies every month and wakes up again.753 Illnesses are sent by X'amaba. He sends them to those
776 persons with whom he is angry. Other spirits have no role in this, and there is no spirit of sickness.

776 There is a host of little spirits, the /ga /ga hú, in the bush. They play tricks.

775 A human being has only one soul, !gaoba. This soul goes to heaven after death. (!nanu-aiba, rain house?) The house of X'amaba (#khauba) is there. Only the doctors know[756] what it looks like up there. They speak with X'amaba.

IKUNG

[27 cont.]

221 Bushmen shrink to miserable skeletons. Many of them at this
 [648] time run to the Blacks or Whites in order to earn something. In
 [731] dry years no attention is paid to the kin group boundaries. All
 [423] gather around the few water holes that are still open. As soon
 as the rain begins, conditions start to improve; the people start
 moving out in various directions, not to meet again until several
 months later at the time of the veldkost harvest here and there.

7. The Course of Life

584 I shall render in literal translation the account that my informant gave of the way a young man courts a girl:

If a young man wants to marry a girl, he must first speak to her and say: "I love you and want to marry you." If the girl is willing, she says first: "You must wait." Then she goes to her parents and asks them whether they have heard that the boy has spoken to her. The parents then ask whether the girl wants to marry the man. [28] If the girl says, "Yes," then the parents say, "He wants you; he has seen that you are good and hard-working; you may marry." If, however, the young man has thought the matter over and takes back his words, the girl goes to her parents once more, and the boy to his. The latter say: "You wanted it this way; nothing can be done about it." In case the girl definitely gives her consent, however, the young man brings all kinds of little presents and gives them to his future bride, who takes them to her parents. The parents-in-law must now in turn give presents. With the exchange of presents, the marriage is regarded as legally concluded.

[583] The hunting test described by Passarge (1) and others is not

[114]

224

584

[113]

1. Passarge, Die Buschmänner der Kalahari, 1907.

the rule. Some vain girls demand it, and sometimes young men will voluntarily go through with it in order to beat his rivals. This hunting test is carried out in the following manner. The boy goes hunting without weapons and pursues the game (as a rule,

1 [i.e. The hot season -- Analyst]

!KUNG

[31 cont.]

582 unmarried. Marriage is concluded at an early age. The age that
165 Bushmen attain is not great. There are relatively few old people
among them, although some of them, it is true, attain a very
593 high age. The children must obey their parents even when they
are grown up and married.

888 The Bushmen indignantly denied that they kill the old people or expose them in the bush. If someone is old, weak, or ill, then they simply walk more slowly or leave the sick person behind with a companion. My informants did report to me that during periods of extreme thirst not only old people, but also women and children who were unable to move on were left behind. This happened only in desperate circumstances, when those who were half-dead from thirst could not be helped in any case and a stay would have resulted in death for the whole kin group. As soon
764 as someone has died, all the women and girls sit around the corpse and weep. There is no singing on this occasion. Then some of the men go and dig a grave in the bush, cut off medium-sized pieces of wood, and place these in the bottom of the grave as a foundation, over which is spread the hay that the deceased was lying on. Then all take the body to the grave and bury it in a crouched position with the back toward the sunrise. Every relative must give a few glass beads and ornaments if the deceased is a woman. This finery is placed around the neck of the deceased. The corpse is rubbed down with green aromatic powder and ochre and is wrapped in its hides and blankets. They either throw thorn on the covered grave or make a four-cornered gutter in the sand around the grave and posts are pounded into the gutter to make a fence. The grave is now in the center of the fence, like the living person in the center of his hut. A cup of water and some food are put near the head area. Deceased men have bows, arrows, and their hunting bag placed on the chest. Children are given their miniature bows. The Bushmen say that they give the bows and arrows not because the deceased needs them for hunting in the beyond, but because they do not want to use the effects of the deceased, whom they loved. According to Vedder (1), the dead

- 73) Later Gai came walking back and we went on toward the fire. We were going, said Gai, to a place where there was a big rock in the Okwa Omaramba, the place where he was born. On the way the ground was smoother, and Gai and Witabe rode in the jeep, and as we went the smoke got thicker, and at the end of the afternoon we saw orange flames above the tops of the bushes. Gai said that we were almost there, and all the men got out of the jeep to walk to the veld fire, leaving me to drive through alone. We were very near. We could feel the heat, and judged that the fire was larger than we had expected. Suddenly the bushes in front of us were caught by the fire and flamed up like tinder, causing me to drive the jeep away and causing the men to step back suddenly, but while I retreated they simply waited for the fire to reach some low grass, and when it did they stepped over it calmly and went on. I found a place where the fire was out, where the jeep could pass, and went safely onto the burned area. Witabe came to find me and showed me a knoll that had not burned and was not sooty, where the others had decided to camp. We left our jeep on some bare sand and unrolled our blankets under the trees.

From our knoll we saw that all the omaramba was in flames. From a fire which had started somewhere to the east of us, a great ring had spread and was now burning around us in an enormous circle. The gap where we had entered had closed again, and the fire surrounded us on our hilltop like a wall, with flames higher than our heads.

The bushes and grass had been consumed at once, but in its path the fire had left great trees in flames, with fires in the trunks that echoed like great chimneys, or fires in the upper branches that flamed like crowns of burning hair. As the trunks burned through, the trees would fall.

The orange sun set into the orange fire, hanging above the

The Fire

61

flames for a moment like a flame itself, then slipping down 731 behind the fire, made the rising smoke a great, soft, purple cloud. As the sky darkened, the flames around us seemed brighter and more yellow, and farther away we saw a thousand smaller fires burning, each in a tuft of grass or in a tree.

After we had eaten we sat watching our burning wall move away from us, listening to the cries of birds, day birds chased from their branches by the fire, night birds flying through the smoke to catch insects that were trying to escape. All the air stank with an oily odor given off by the burning trees—not at all the pleasant smell of burning wood, but a deathly odor, the smell of a forest being destroyed.

When we lay down in our blankets to sleep we found that even the ground was warm, and as soot and ashes drifted over us we lay awake and listened. Once during the night we heard something large run past us. A little later, farther away, we heard the sharp roar of a lion who must have tried to cross a patch of burned ground and had singed his soft paws. We heard his slow footsteps as he tested the earth carefully, then a grunt as he was scorched again. It made him cross, for he walked in a huge half-circle around us with a growl running steadily in his throat. I had thought that the Bush-^[152]men were asleep, but they had also heard him and they ^{522]}laughed. Now and then, during the night, the burned trees crashed around us, and as our fiery wall moved slowly away, the rising smoke was gray in its yellow light, the stars were all obscured.

Before dawn in the morning the crescent of the new moon¹³² rose, the tiniest sliver in the chilly air, followed by the salmon band of light, redder than usual because of the smoke. The wind must have blown a good deal of the fire back on itself because much of it was out, leaving a cloud of smoke hanging

132 Above the earth in a layer. We were crouching at a fire we
 had built, warming our hands against the cold, when the sun
 came up. We heard birds singing in the fresh air as if nothing
 512 had happened, then the sound of faint pounding far away,
 a mortar being struck with a pestle. Soon we heard a second
 mortar join the first as another woman began breakfast for
 her family, and we knew that two women meant perhaps
 six people, therefore a band.

276 Gai stood up and stretched his legs, then took a tiny coal
 from our fire between his thumb and finger and dropped it
 into his pipe, inhaling deeply and holding the smoke in his
 lungs while he handed the pipe to Witabe, who also puffed
 and returned the pipe, when at last Gai exhaled, spat, and
 scooped the pipe through the sand, extinguishing the fire and
 saving the rest of the tobacco. He stuck the pipe in his belt,
 482 flung his great kaross over his chest to warm his belly, and
 481 strode off in the direction of the sound, the ragged edges of
 his great cape swinging at his ankles as his strong feet car-
 ried him away. He walked under a burned log that had partly
 fallen and was braced up by another tree, and as he did the
 white ashes blew from it and the light of dawn shone through
 the ash like light through a flurry of snow.

731 Later in the day, when we had eaten cornmeal for break-
 fast, while we waited for Gai to come back, we went down
 to the flats below our hilltop to inspect the damage of the
 fire. The land below our camp was in utter desolation, star-
 tling and ruined, a desert of ash. We found only the orange
 sand and black ashes still in the shape of the grass blades
 that made them, black ashes below burned bushes still in the
 shape of the leaves that made them, and, on the ground, flat,
 perfect skeletons of vines, just in the shape of the vines that
 made them but black, in powder, disintegrating into dust
 when the wind touched them. All around us lay the smolder-

The Fire

83

ing great carcasses of fallen trees, some with the leaves on the top still green, that were filling the air with the smell of their wood burning. The ground was still warm to walk on, but all the bushes, all the little succulents, all the vines that marked the water roots were gone; no snake or lizard or animal was there, all were burned or had gone; we saw only animal tracks half filled with ashes, and a few birds come to eat dead insects. We saw a pair of secretary birds and later a pair of [136] paouw, huge gray birds that walk more than they fly, wandering through the ruins looking for dead reptiles.

As we walked, fine black powder rose to dust our legs, and now and then, off through the standing tree trunks and between the fallen trees' great upflung roots, little whirlwinds crossed back and forth, raising the dust in spiraled pillars. [921] Bushmen say that whirlwinds show the presence of the spir-775] its of the dead.

Witabe's eyes searched over the ground, and when he saw a small mound of earth he walked up to it and punctured it with his toe. Out rushed a horde of ants, which had been safe in their tunnels when the fire passed and now began at once to repair their damaged mound. Witabe crouched among them and began to pick and eat them, selecting the soldier ants, ones with large heads and heavy jaws. He bit off the abdomens, tossing the heads away. Presently he offered some to us, as I had feared he would; as everyone else ate one, I did also, and found that it was not too unpleasant but sour and very watery, very like a blackberry before it is ripe. The workers, I am told, are tasteless, but the fighters are considered a near-delicacy; mine opened her jaws wide to fight my thumb before I ate her.

Later in the day, when the sun in the sky, the still burning trees, and the fire-warmed sand made the air on the flats unbearably hot, we turned back to camp for the shade of our

Mood Songs

123

Ukane had asked his wife if her brother had returned. She⁵³³ had answered "Yes," and Ukwane had composed the song about it out of guilt and sorrow.

"A Song of Shouting" was beautiful, too. When Ukwane had explained it to us and we had asked him to sing some more, he smiled at us and said that he was tired. But the day of jealousies, the fact that he had not found his piece of string, and the subject of his songs had put him in a mood, and presently he began to tell us what was in his heart.

He said that he was old and blind, and that he and his⁵³³ wife could no longer support one another but had to depend⁸⁸⁸ on Tsetchwe and Gai. Even Twikwe and Dasina were old and would not be strong much longer, and if Gai should leave them, perhaps to go to his Bakalahari father, the old people would perish surely.

Hearing Ukwane's cracked voice saying these sad things, his wife got up from her bed and sat beside him in silence. Soon Twikwe and Dasina joined him, too, so all the old people were there, crouching near the fire, their eyes gazing over its light out into the darkness.

Presently Dasina said: "It is bad to die because when you die you are all alone," and after being silent for a moment Ukwane told us how various members of his band, once a large one, had died, reducing their number to the hardy few who lived with him now. Both his father and his mother had died of thirst, and his children, his young nieces and nephews,⁷³¹ and his grandchildren had all died in an epidemic of smallpox¹⁶⁵ three years before. That had been a horrifying season, and in the hottest time, when the sun was drying them all and the ground was too hot to walk on, the smallpox had come, and pox had got into people's mouths so that they could not eat, and the children had all died one morning and their young mothers had died before night.

888 The old people, the survivors, had not expected to outlive
 764 their children and grandchildren, and then they had to bury
 731 them; they had scooped shallow graves for them and had
 placed their bodies inside, then had covered the graves with
 branches. The old people had then lived by the graves for
 months to mourn and to protect the corpses from marauding
 animals. It had been a ghastly season, a season of carnage,
 and the old people did not like to think about it even now.
 We watched their sad faces when they spoke of it and saw
 that these old people themselves felt death very near, fore-
 seeing the day when Gai would leave them, when the melons
 would dry, when they would starve.

Suddenly, unnoticed into the midst of this discussion came
 the baby Nhwakwe, having been awakened by the voices,
 his eyes still filled with sleep, to put an empty vegetable husk
 on the head of his grandmother, Dasina. She was too de-
 [158] pressed to notice, though, and presently the husk fell off and
 Nhwakwe stumbled back to his sleeping-place, secure be-
 tween his father and his mother, as though perhaps he had
 not fully awakened at all.

888 Dasina was speaking. She said again: "To die is bad, but
 761 in the end we all die anyway," and Ukwane said he did not
 expect to live another season. Then he asked us when we
 would have to leave. We told him that we were leaving in a
 very few days, and he said he was sorry to hear it, but if we
 liked he would come back to our country with us to tell us
 everything he knew about the customs of the Gikwe. We told
 609 him sadly that this would not be possible, and he said that in
 that case he would live out his life beside our track, waiting
 for the day when we would return. We told him not to do
 even that, for European farmers would surely follow our
 tracks into the desert looking for Bushmen to take as servants.

Peoples of the Veld and Sky

149

greatly esteemed and is gathered from the crust of the pan in moist balls. Bushmen sprinkle the surface with water in order to roll up just the first layer where the salt lies. When the salt balls dry, Bushmen crumble them into their food, preferring salt to all sweet things and honey. Once when we asked some of the Gautscha people what they called themselves they replied with this phrase: "We are a salty people, who come from a salty place."

In the dry season, two hundred people came to Gautscha and lived in the bushes at the edge of the pan. This was an enormous number for any area to support, but all had indisputable rights to be there, for either their fathers had drunk at Gautscha or they had relatives whose fathers had; by the rather complicated system, any Bushman may drink water and gather veld food wherever his parents had a right to do so, or may live with either his parents, his brothers or sisters, or his wife at any place where the relative of his choice has rights. There was water but not much food at Gautscha, and all the people got thin and very hungry and sat around their fires at night with sweat pouring from their bodies but with nothing to eat; to make matters worse, one man coming for a visit proved to be ill and gave his disease to everyone. It was a disease that caused vomiting, high fevers, chest pains, and nosebleeds of great intensity—a woman whom I tried to cure bled all one morning with blood squirting from her nostrils, pouring down over her arms and hands and dripping from her elbows, making a dark pool on the ground. The disease struck all the people, from the youngest infants to the oldest grandparents, and all the people lay for days scattered all over the ground, too ill to move. We did everything we could, of course; we provided food and medicine, firewood and water, and took turns staying up all night to nurse the people. As it happened, everyone got better within fourteen

- 731 days, although not all were completely cured; and many, feeling that their luck was very bad at Gautscha, decided to take 361 their chances at other places in the veld where, although there was no water, there were watery roots that could be scraped for moisture. One day many of the people walked away in single file, taking their belongings and carrying on their backs their relatives still too sick to travel, leaving Gautscha Pan deserted except for the three small family bands who made their permanent home there.
- 764 One day when we were traveling in the veld about twenty
888 miles from Gautscha we came upon an old man lying on his face on the sand in an open place. He was a member of one of the bands at Gautscha that tried to escape bad luck, and, thinking he was hurt, we stopped at once. But he was not hurt; when we came near him he did not get up, but turned his face away from us and lay as if dazed, pressing one hand to his forehead. We knew him; he was the only Bushman of any nation we had ever met or even heard of who had never married, this because Bushman men must shoot a buck and 582
881 undergo initiation before they can marry, which he had never 162 done. Instead he lived with his sister, who took care of him and provided him with food, and who had been very ill during the plague at Gautscha. As we looked at him the headman of that band stepped out of the bushes and told us that the old man was not ill but grieving for his sister, who lay dead in a grove of thorn trees a little way beyond. The old man, who had been alone with his sister when she died, had been too weak from the illness to bury her, and had only been able to hide her body under a pile of stones. When the other members of the band had returned to the grove after a day or so of veld food-gathering, it had been too late, too dangerous because of the now roaming spirit, for them to assist

789 also to protect young people of the same sex. The choa ceremonies are performed in the Veld Food Season for each of the powerful veld foods as they ripen. The ceremony itself is simple; in order to choa tsi, for example, an old woman simply chews a mouthful of tsi with a few bites of a root called *shasha* if *shasha* is available or any one of certain other permissible roots if *shasha* is not, and spits the resulting paste into her palms. If she is choaing herself she washes her hands in the paste; if she is choaing a younger woman she rubs the paste on the young woman's arms and chest. It is an important ceremony, for no young person would think of eating tsi without it, but it is at the same time a casual, household ceremony, done without fuss or audience; oftener than not, it will be performed in the morning before breakfast, say, or when the woman is resting for a moment in the veld, ceasing her digging to drink a sip of water. It is a powerful ceremony, though, for the woman choaed may then eat tsi in safety for a whole year, until the next season when it ripens again.

731 That year, in the Veld Food Season, there was a tragedy and also a wedding. The tragedy took place late one afternoon when a baby girl, playing house with a real fire, burned down her grandfather's grass scherm, thus destroying everything her grandparents owned, everything they had made over a lifetime. The two old people had been very industrious and the wife a prolific maker of ostrich-eggshell beads.

At the start of the blaze a great crowd of people gathered, arriving just in time to see the baby girl run out of the scherm as it collapsed in flames behind her. She ran straight to her mother and sat at her feet, ignoring the great crowd of people and placidly eating one of her grandfather's leather sandals which she had rescued from the fire and which, she found, had been cooked to a turn. No one was angry with the child,

Peoples of the Veld and Sky

157

everyone was thankful that she had not been hurt. The people⁷³¹ remarked at the size and the intensity of the fire and shook their heads at the destruction, each one telling someone else where he had been when he first had seen the blaze. They asked each other why no one put the fire out, as no one did, and soon the scherm was a heap of white ash and the old couple who owned it ruined materially, too old to start again.

A few weeks after that, two children were married. The⁵⁸² groom was about sixteen and the bride was eight. It was con-⁸³⁵sidered to be an excellent match, as the bride was pretty and the groom was already becoming famous as a hunter. But even in these auspicious circumstances complications and involved negotiations arose, until, for a while, people began to think that no wedding would take place. The bride's aunt^[578] disliked the groom's mother, and recalled an old scandal that had shadowed the family for years. The groom's mother had divorced the groom's father long ago to marry her present husband, which in itself was altogether usual, but it came out that the man and woman had maintained an adulterous relationship before the divorce and furthermore were tabu relatives, which made their union incestuous—not as severely so as marriage between parent and child or brother and sister, but incestuous nevertheless—and it caused a scandal that reverberated throughout all of Nyae Nyae. The two were middle-aged when they married, and they had clung sol-^[593]idly together through the storm of scandal and disapproval, for it was truly a marriage of love.

The little girl did not want to be a bride. When we asked⁵⁸⁴ her how she felt about her wedding she hid her face in her hands and said that she was still a young child, too young to get married.

All in all, only the groom's family behaved well, showing patience and forbearance until at last the wedding took place.

132 themselves for the winter and in a state most suitable for food. The desert pales. Day and night, water evaporates from the pans; first becoming a film, then less than a film, with only the damp clay glistening. One noon, the clay begins to wrinkle in the sun. By June, the earth is dry: the land is fast and quietly held by winter.

132
● 731 Such would be a perfect round of seasons. In the periods of drought that have come every few years in the recent past, however, there have been no such perfect seasons and all living things have, of necessity, fastened tenaciously to the drying earth and held on. Even in normal years, the weather is unbalanced: large areas of the Kalahari may be flooded, while others receive a sprinkling of rain in what amounts to drought conditions. In this land, and through these seasons, the !Kung nation lives.

[30] THE AREA in which the !Kung now
174 live is called Nyae Nyae. How long they have lived there is not

133
142
291
301
482



On the Move A Bushman hangs his possessions on a carrying stick and thrusts his assegai under the stick in back to distribute the weight onto both shoulders.

222 When the people go to gather mangettis or tsī the men always ac-
462 company the women and help to gather and to carry the heavy loads—as much as they possibly can—back to the water hole.

Though the men help, especially with tsī and mangettis, gathering and digging are the work of women and the work that takes up the greater portion of their energy and time throughout their lives. Their digging implement is a sharpened, unweighted stick about three feet long. When we were living with the Gautscha bands at the Gautscha water hole in the dry season, the women went to gather every day or every second or third day, depending on the distance and on how much food they could carry back. They would plan which patch or fertile area to go to and start out in small groups, some to one place, some to another. They would walk five or ten or fifteen miles to their destination and then pick berries or dig roots, which may lie two feet or more under the ground, until the mid-afternoon, and then start back to the werf (campsite) at the water hole. They carry their infants tied to them, small children on their shoulders, and the loads of veldkos in the bulges of their karosses (skin capes). When they near the werf, they pick up two or three logs for the night fires.

The veldkos that each woman gathers belongs to her and with it she feeds her own family, sharing with whatever relative or friend she wishes. Custom does not require her to share it in a systematic way with others as meat must be shared. She cooks her veldkos in the coals and hot ashes, 252 pounds fibrous roots and hard berries in her mortar, and serves the food to her family as a family meal, usually in the evening. During the day, however, people may cook and eat little snacks at odd times.

222 Although there are numerous kinds of veldkos, we must not give the
433 impression that there is a great abundance. In fact, the opposite is true. Food
731 is scarce all over the arid Kalahari, where drought is the scourge on all—the cattle raisers, the dry farmers, and the gatherers of the wild foods.

128 There has been much intermarriage in the Nyae Nyae region. Families
166 therefore may have close relatives—with whom they have the right to live—
182